DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 377 542 EA 026 212

AUTHOR	Fenstermacher, Gary D.
TITLE	The Absence of Democratic and Educational Ideals from Contemporary Educational Reform Initiatives.
INSTITUTION	Educational Press Association of America, Glassboro, N.J.
PUB DATE	10 Jun 94
NOTE	25p.; Elam Lecture presented at the EDPRESS Conference (Chicago, IL, June 10, 1994).
AVAILABLE FROM	Educational Press Association of America, 201 Mullica Hill Road, Glassboro, NJ 08028 ($5).
PUB TYPE	Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Critical Theory; *Democracy; *Democratic Values; *Educational Change; *Educational Philosophy; Educational Policy; Educational Principles; Elementary Secondary Education

ABSTRACT

This paper argues that there is a near-complete absence of the ideals of democracy from the rhetoric and results of those who make, influence, and implement educational policy. Tied to this is the assertion that any loss of the educational ideal constitutes a loss of democratic ideal. The connection between education and liberal democracy is explored, and it is concluded that the loss of democratic ideals permits the preservation of privilege and position for the elites, while subjugating the less fortunate groups in society. It is recommended that educators and the educational press regain an understanding of democracy and its present state in America. A dilemma for democracy is how the members of each and every doctrine can find a common basis for preserving union, how to form common space, speech, and commitments while preserving differences. Second, educators and the press must examine ways to foster social capital for the development of character and critical habits of mind, as well as that core of beliefs necessary to assume responsibility for democratic restoration. Dissent, which presents a sustained, thoughtful opposition to a story line, is differentiated from disagreement, which focuses on differences and lack of agreement. Dissent, however, occupies an equal portion of the story with the purpose of informing the debate. The press and professoriate must work together to regain commitment to sustain the ideals of democracy and education. (LMI)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 377 542

EdPress presents

GARY D FENSTERMACHER
UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA
1994 ELAM LECTURER

The Absence of Democratic and Educational Ideals from Contemporary Educational Reform Initiatives

EDPRESS CONFERENCE 1994
SHERATON PLAZA HOTEL
CHICAGO, IL
JUNE 10, 1994

EdPress presents the Elam Lecture through a grant from Carus Publishing Company, publishers of *Cricket, Ladybug, Spider,* and *Baby Bug* magazines, and the Open Court elementary reading and mathematics curricula.

EA 026212

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
✓ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
D.R. Stoll
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

EdPress, founded in 1895, nurtures and promotes the quality, health, and community of educational publishing. Core services include conferences, awards, publications, and other professional activities. For more information, contact:

EdPress Headquarters
Rowan College of New Jersey
201 Mullica Hill Road
Glassboro, NJ 08028-1701
Phone: (609) 256-4610
Fax: (609) 256-4922

Joe McGavin, Capitol Publications, President
Cathy Vanderhoof, Scholastic Inc., Vice President
Carolyn P. Yoder, Cobblestone Publishing, Secretary
James Alvino, James Alvino & Associates, Treasurer
Dolores B. Bohen, Fairfax County (VA) Public Schools, Member-at-Large
John J. Micklos, Jr., International Reading Association, Regional-Representative-at-Large
Donald R. Stoll, Executive Director
Julia Mercier, Managing Director

The Absence of Democratic and Educational Ideals from Contemporary Educational Reform Initiatives

It is a considerable pleasure to serve as the 1994 Elam Lecturer. I hope that what I have to say brings honor to EdPress in the same way your invitation has brought honor to me. Let me begin by asking you a few questions.

What do you think of the current educational reform movement? Are you generally in favor of, opposed to, or confused by it? To what extent do your views on today's educational reform initiatives affect your work? Do you sense that you have an obligation to shape as well as report what is taking place in American educational reform? These are among the questions I want to explore with you this afternoon.

I will do so from the perspective of one who is profoundly troubled by what is taking place in American educational reform. I will try to convince you that my concerns are well founded, and that, should you come to share my sense of foreboding, you and I have a duty to try to reshape the reform agenda and its implementation. As I move toward these conclusions, I will also make clear my belief that education publishers, editors and writers, like professors of education, have been dangerously lax in exercising their duties as informants to the public and as preservationists for democratic and educational ideals.

With these opening comments I seem to have put quite a few of my cards on the table, and the game has hardly begun. With so much of my hand revealed, I may as well go on to show it all. What troubles me most about the

last ten years of educational reform—since the appearance of *A Nation at Risk*[1]—is the near-complete absence of the ideas and ideals of democracy from the rhetoric and the results of those who make, influence and implement educational policy. We hear a great deal about readying the next generation of workers for global competition, about being first in the world in such high status subjects as math and science, and about having world-class standards for what is learned in school. We hear almost nothing about civic participation or building and maintaining democratic communities, whether these be neighborhoods or governments at the local, state or federal levels. The advancement of democratic ideals and institutions goes largely unmentioned, taken for granted or insufficiently important to rank up there with such world-shaking events as our playing Avis to Japan's Hertz.

Indeed, it is not simply the failure to attend to matters democratic that disturbs me so much. It is also the failure to attend to matters educational. Not only does the current national reform movement in the United States pay too little attention to the ideas and ideals of democracy, it pays far too little attention to the ideas and ideals of education. So much so that there is virtually no humor in the question, "What's educational about educational reform?" In these times, that is a serious question. It is another of the questions to be explored in the next half hour of our time together.

If you are a student of American education, you already know that I have engaged in some sleight of hand in the last few moments. While placing my cards on the table, I implied that there are two different agendas to be pursued. First, what happened to the ideas and ideals of democracy in the current educational reform movement? Second, what happened to the ideas and ideals of education in the reform movement? For many educational theorists, these two questions are simply mirror images of one another; answering one well and properly answers the other. It is for this reason that education and democracy are so intertwined, so critical to one another's vitality. And it is for this reason that any loss of democratic ideal in the rhetoric and practice of educational reform is a loss of educational ideal as well. The relationship also works in the opposite direction: any loss of educational ideal constitutes a loss of democratic ideal.

I should not move so quickly here, for this is conceptual territory that cannot be hastily tra-

versed. The connection between democracy and education is not a natural one; it does not arise out of the everyday course of human events. It is instead one that uniquely obtains in what are called liberal democracies[2]—democracies that vest the powers and responsibilities of government in the people as a whole, rather than in a particular political party or ruling elite. In a liberal democracy, the people both rule and are ruled for their mutual benefit. This arrangement gives rise to many thorny problems, as *The Federalist Papers* and Tocqueville's *Democracy in America* so cogently demonstrate. Among the most troublesome of these problems is how to ensure that the people are made capable of exercising the awesome responsibility of governing themselves.

EDUCATION AND DEMOCRACY

Education—mass, popular, common education that prepares all who are to govern for the duties and responsibilities of doing so—is the answer to this problem. In a liberal democracy, all who are eligible for citizenship must be provided an education, an education enabling them to achieve a fitness to govern and to be governed. This conception of the link between education and democracy is what led Thomas Jefferson to so bluntly declare that "if a nation expects to be ignorant and free, in a state of civilization, it expects what never was and never will be."[3]

The connection between education and democracy is also evident in the Massachusetts Constitution of 1780, where it is stated that "Wisdom and knowledge, as well as virtue, diffused generally among the people ... [are] necessary for the preservation of their rights and liberties." It is evident in the Ordinance of 1787, wherein the state of Virginia ceded the land northwest of the Ohio river to the United States. Article III of the Ordinance states that "religion, morality and knowledge being necessary to good government and the happiness of mankind, schools and the means of education shall forever be encouraged."[4]

The statements of great leaders and the critical documents of American history vouch again and again for this connection between education and democracy. It pervades virtually every aspect of the conversation about building and maintaining a liberal democracy. Until quite recently. In this last decade we have heard hardly a word about the vital relationships between education and democracy, yet we have been in the midst of one of the most pervasive educational reform movements in our history. In his recent

book, *The Ennobling of Democracy*,[5] Thomas Pangle remarks on how, in his 1990 State of the Union address, George Bush reiterated the themes and commitments that had been developed six months earlier at the Education Summit in Charlottesville, Virginia. Pangle then says,

> What was striking was how little the president had to say regarding the *content* of education. What was remarkable was his almost complete silence about which sorts of lessons were or ought to be considered truly important.... There was indeed a single passing reference, in the context of a call for literacy, to the fact that education must somehow prepare Americans to be *citizens*. But otherwise the education being discussed might well be regarded as an education aimed simply at the acquisition of skills needed to work and compete well in a modern, technological world economy.
>
> Nothing testifies more vividly [than this] to the loss, in American democracy, of clarity about the most important goal of public education in a republican society. (p. 163)

Echoing Pangle, Benjamin Barber, in the Prologue to *An Aristocracy of Everyone*,[6] sets forth his belief that "democracy is not a natural form of association; it is an extraordinary and rare contrivance of cultivated imagination" (p. 5). To make democracy work, he says, there must be citizens. "Citizens are men and women educated for excellence—by which term I mean the knowledge and competence to govern in common their own lives" (p. 5). Having established this groundwork, Barber then remarks:

> There is endless talk today about education, but between the hysteria and the cynicism there seems to be little room for civic learning, hardly any for democracy. Yet the fundamental task of education in a democracy is the apprenticeship of liberty—learning to be free. (p. 4)

Pangle and Barber are not the only ones to notice this disappearance of the ideas and ideals of democracy from proposals for educational reform. John Goodlad,[7] Patricia Graham[8] and Henry Giroux,[9] to name only a few, have also commented on the loss. Of those who have taken note of the loss of democratic ideal, only a very few have ven-

tured an explanation for why the relationship has deteriorated so badly. Among those who have is a group known as the Critical Pedagogues, a group tied to the groundbreaking theories of Paulo Freire and including Stanley Aronowitz, Henry Giroux, Peter McLaren and Ira Shor.[10]

I mention this group of theorists in part because their work is so little discussed beyond the walls of the academy (where it is often subject to as much scorn as praise), and because I have seldom encountered a set of explanations that I find more compelling but which I want so much to resist. To the Critical Pedagogues, there is an obvious reason for the loss of democratic ideal: It is a way to maintain power and privilege, it provides for the continuing accumulation and concentration of wealth, and it preserves colonial practices upon which the vitality of capitalism is, in their view, so dependent. For the Critical Pedagogue, the loss of democratic ideal permits the preservation of privilege and position for the elites, while subjugating the less fortunate, typically persons of color, or women, or the poor.

How strongly I try to resist the theories of the Critical Pedagogues! I do so for a number of reasons. First, I come from a family of capitalist entrepreneurs, owners and operators of retail businesses from 1857 to this very day. They are my family; they are good people, what we would have called, in an earlier time, bedrock Americans. I cannot imagine them exploiting, colonizing, using master narratives to dominate persons who are different, or doing harm to humanity merely by virtue of their own success. If I accept the argument of the Critical Pedagogues, I would have to alter my view of my family, in ways that I do not find acceptable. Another reason I find it so hard to accept the theses of Critical Pedagogy is that so much of their literature is filled with arcane language, linguistic constructions more confounding than those of Husserel or Sartre, and it is frequently caustic—features that make a more conventional academic such as myself skeptical of their arguments.

Yet I cannot break free of their explanatory framework. How else does one explain the horrible conditions of schooling that befall students of poor families and those of color described by Jonathan Kozol in *Savage Inequalities*?[11] How does one make sense of life in the housing projects in [Chicago] that Alex Kotlowitz so graphically depicts in *There Are No Children Here*?[12] What other explanations are there for the miserable futures of chil-

dren predicted by Harold Hodgkinson's demographic studies[13] or Fred Hechinger's recent work, *Fateful Choices*?[14] How else to account for the growth of crime and incarceration among children and youth and for the diminishing occupational opportunities they face? Are these phenomena mere accidents of fate? Are they simply features of this particular time in a sweeping historical cycle, unrelated to the motivations and conduct of those who hold power and wealth? I wish I had the brain of a da Vinci or an Einstein; then perhaps I could figure out what is happening here. But I do not, and I cannot explain why the fate of our children is so awful to contemplate, while the rhetoric and practice of educational reform is so grandiose in its claims—yet so completely unrelated to the realities of our cities, our poor, our children, our democracy.

THE CRUEL HOAX OF REFORM

Is it really so hard to see that the goal of being first in the world in mathematics and science achievement is a cruel hoax for children of the ghetto, the barrio, and the reservation? Does anyone really believe that by the year 2000 all children will start school ready to learn when practically every economic indicator we have shows that the fate and welfare of our children is declining, not improving? Writing in *The Nation* a few weeks ago, Milton Schwebel[15] commented on the goal that by the year 2000 every school in the U.S. will be free of drugs and violence. "There is nothing on the horizon," he writes, "not even a faint hope, to justify this bill's goal.... One is tempted to wonder whether the authors of this goal were themselves under the influence of some delusion-inducing stimulus."[16] After citing demographic, educational, health and family data in relation to several of the national goals, Schwebel concludes: "Only those who look for favors from the tooth fairy and Santa Claus can believe the promises of Goals 2000. The rest will be tempted to wonder whether Goals 2000 should be called the Educational Scam 1994."[17]

There are, of course, other educational reform activities beyond Goals 2000 and Educate America.[18] Among the more prominent are the development of a national curriculum, the professionalization of teaching, and the implementation of school choice plans. Here, too, the ideals of democracy are absent. We have not asked ourselves, save for a few discussions around proposals for vouchers, about the effects of these proposals on learning the lessons of liberty or upon the

maintenance of a liberal democracy. Instead these proposals are grounded in issues of making American students better learners and higher academic achievers.

Well, you may say, it isn't so good that we seem to have lost our democratic ideals in the current reform movement, but what's wrong with making American students better learners and higher achievers? I'm happy you asked, for that is just the question I wish to answer. There are two responses. The first is to ask who is going to become better at learning and achieving. Given the demographic, economic, and social data before us, the answer is that the very same people who always got better are going to continue to get better, while those who have not been the traditional beneficiaries of schooling are going to fare the same or worse than before. Those who will gain are the students with nurturing parents, with good family incomes living in school districts that can afford good schools, and who are more likely than not to grow up within the same culture that currently produces America's movers and shakers.

The second response is that emerging analyses are showing the U.S. faring a good deal better on academic attainment indicators than reports from the government, the press, and a number of special interest groups would have us believe. Gerald Bracey's reports in the *Phi Delta Kappan* over the last few years[19] show that much of the same data used to forecast educational gloom and doom can be re-analyzed according to sound psychometric principles to show almost the opposite. David Berliner's address to the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education two years ago[20] offered convincing arguments that, when the same standardized data used to show declines in educational achievement are disaggregated and reanalyzed, they show that American schools and students are either holding their own or making noteworthy academic strides, particularly given the conditions of family life and income that characterize so many of our school children. Berliner characterized current techniques for reporting data about schools as disinformation, intentionally propagated by those who benefit most from keeping public attention focused on the downside of American schooling.

Thus not even the arguments for better learning and higher achievement have the credibility that many of their advocates believe. If this is indeed so, we might more profitably turn to a different set of questions: Why are we pressing for these particular reforms? Who will benefit from the implementation of the

current reform initiatives? Who will suffer or be disadvantaged by the enactment of these reforms? What will be the consequences for our democratic nation as we now know it if the current reforms are successfully implemented as the primary reforms in American education for the next several decades?

These questions return us to the theories of the Critical Pedagogues, as they turn our attention away from the hype and superficial appeal of world-class standards and high academic achievement to matters far more essential to the maintenance and strengthening of democracy and education. The Bracey and Berliner analyses raise serious questions about the integrity of the claims made by today's reformers who contend that we must have higher standards and higher outcomes. Combined with the demographic data of Hodgkinson and others who address the plight of America's children, we can only marvel at the scale of the sleight of hand taking place in today's reform context. The reform proposals not only fail to address matters of democracy and civic participation, they show every potential for limiting our liberties and freedoms by denying a first-class education to all children and youth, regardless of their color, their family incomes, their religious convictions, and their school attendance zones. Whether or not the Critical Pedagogues offer us the right explanation for the chasm of credibility that separates the reform agenda from the realities of our children's lives, there can be little doubt that their description of the problem is a sound one. It is a description shared by many who haven't even a dollop of Karl Marx or Paulo Freire in their philosophies,[21] yet are cognizant of the gap between children and the schools they attend, on the one hand, and the politicians and policy makers who are the advocates for educational reform on the other.

RESTORING THE CONNECTION BETWEEN DEMOCRACY AND EDUCATION

What would we need to do to change our course, to more honestly and directly confront the social and economic realities of America's children, to restore the historical connection between democracy and education, and to ensure that all America's children receive an education that constitutes both an apprenticeship in liberty as well as preparation for work and enlightened life? I have a few thoughts. I offer them with some trepidation, for I am in awe of the scope of our problems and the scale of the enterprise. I offer

them more as a way to indicate how the discussion of educational reform might be recast than as actual blueprints for a new reform agenda.

The first effort that should engage us is to regain our understanding of democracy and its present state in America. There are many books on the subject, classic and contemporary, and there is a modest renaissance occurring in the study of democracy and its applications to both the U.S. and the world.[22] I am particularly fond of the work of John Rawls. In his most recent book,[23] he enunciates with precision the modern challenge for democracy. He writes:

> Now the serious problem is this: A modern democratic society is characterized not simply by a pluralism of comprehensive religious, philosophical, and moral doctrines but by a pluralism of incompatible yet reasonable comprehensive doctrines. No one of these doctrines is affirmed by citizens generally. Nor should one expect that in the foreseeable future one of them, or some other reasonable doctrine, will ever be affirmed by all, or nearly all, citizens.[24]

I understand Rawls to be formulating the democratic problem of our time. It is founded on the acknowledgement of difference, on the growing legitimacy of pluralism, on the burgeoning of special interests, and on the impact of postmodern thought on our views of knowledge, morality, and politics. It is a problem that if misunderstood or mishandled could bring great havoc to this nation. It is a problem that requires us to honor difference while at the same time finding common ground. It is a problem that raises serious skepticism about *E pluribus unum,* and calls for our figuring out whether it is still possible to have *unum* in a world that is so importantly and purposefully *pluribus.*

If this problem is to be confronted and resolved in a manner consistent with the tenets of a liberal democracy, we must prepare tomorrow's citizens to understand it and come to grips with it. To do this successfully, we cannot merely select some of our citizens to do this work, say the well-off and politically savvy, for this problem is about the rights, privileges, and identities of everyone. If everyone is not involved in its resolution, it is unlikely that it will be resolved at all.

I hope I have made this point clearly, for it is an important one. If Rawls is correct, as I believe he is, about the serious problem of modern democracy, then he has defined a situation wherein the

members of each and every comprehensive doctrine must seek and find a common basis for preserving union. There is only one way I know to make such a situation possible: prepare all the people to undertake this search and resolution. Education is the only way I know to do that.

The education that is needed now, however, is different from the education called for by the Founding Fathers, by Henry Barnard and Horace Mann, by James Conant and by so many of the other great figures in American education. For this education is not one bent to assimilation, to the melting of different cultures and languages into some common American pot, or to merely readying today's children for tomorrow's workforce. In contrast, the education that must engage us today and in the future is how to form common space and common speech and common commitments while respecting and preserving our differences in heritage, race, language, culture, gender, sexual orientation, spiritual values, and political ideologies. It is a new challenge for America, one which this nation must understand and resolve in the same way it met and resolved a similar challenge two centuries ago.

To understand what I mean here, let me take you back more than two hundred years, to 1783. Noah Webster's new speller appeared that year, a part of a series of books entitled *A Grammatical Institute, of the English Language, Comprising an Easy, Concise, and Systematic Method of Education, Designed for the Use of English Schools in America.* Webster opens his new book with these words—it is a longish quotation, so please bear with me, for I want you to have a sense of Webster's world view:

> The author wishes to promote the honor and prosperity of the confederated republics of America, and cheerfully throws his might into the common treasure of patriotic exertions. This country must in some future time, be as distinguished by the superiority of her literary improvements, as she is already by the liberality of her civil and ecclesiastical constitutions. Europe is grown old in folly, corruption and tyranny—in that country laws are perverted, manners are licentious, literature is declining and human nature is debased. For America in her infancy to adopt the present maxims of the Old World, would be to stamp the wrinkles of decrepit age upon the

bloom of youth and to plant the seeds of decay in a vigorous constitution. American glory begins to dawn at a favorable period, and under flattering circumstances. We have the experience of the whole world before our eyes; but to receive indiscriminately the maxims of government, the manners and the literary taste of Europe and make them the ground on which to build our systems in America, must soon convince us that a durable and stately edifice can never be erected upon the moldering pillars of antiquity. It is the business of America to select the wisdom of all nations, as the basis for her constitutions,—to avoid their errors,—to prevent the introduction of foreign vices and corruptions and check the career of her own,—to promote virtue and patriotism,—to embellish and improve the sciences,—to diffuse a uniformity and purity of language,—to add superior dignity to this infant empire and to human nature.[25]

I wanted to read this quotation in its entirety to give you a sense of the fresh beginnings, the youthful vitality, that sparked so much of the thinking and the deeds of men and women who shaped this nation two hundred and more years ago. It is precisely this sense of beginning anew that I believe is needed now. We must acknowledge that we cannot maintain ourselves, we cannot carry ourselves or this nation forward, with the same concepts and the techniques that enabled us to do it once before. We are faced with very different challenges, in quite different orders of magnitude, than those that greeted us from the mid-1700s to the mid-1900s. The task is to meet these challenges in ways that preserve both union and diversity, democracy and difference, nationhood and neighborhood.

Were you to ask me whether it is possible for us to do what I have said must be done, I would confess that I am not sure we can do it. By "we" I mean you and me, the over twenty and under sixty crowd. I believe we are not sufficiently well prepared for the work, as too few of us were taught and successfully learned the lessons of liberty. Too many of us have gained advantage from going our own ways, separating ourselves from the common weal, while cultivating a culture of narcissism and self-interest.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

THEY CAN DO IT

We cannot do it, but they can. "They" are our children and the children of our children. They can be thoughtfully instructed in our heritage, on the problems that we face in maintaining democracy, and in finding the means to resolve the problems of democracy in these times. We, I believe, are unable to find the resolutions, for we lack the skills, the understanding, the shared values, the sustaining culture needed to do it. But we can prepare them for the work ahead. We can make it possible for them to be the first in the world in learning the lessons of liberty. And to have a democracy that is world-class, one that serves as a much needed model for a world that seems presently at a loss for what it is to become.

I confess to glossing over some vital points here. We cannot, as you well know, achieve the restoration of democratic ideals amidst a pluralism of conflicting doctrines by merely substituting civics for mathematics, social studies for science, and history for geography. The democratic restoration I am arguing for here is one that must deal with the fact that not all persons will have marvelous jobs with high paying salaries, but all persons will, in the course of their political and legal affairs, be entitled to the same consideration and influence as every other person. To achieve this end, we cannot understand the task of education as merely that of teaching subjects or building skills. Education is something far more than that. As the Harvard philosopher, Israel Scheffler puts it, education

> must encompass . . . the formation of habits of judgment and the development of character, the elevation of standards, the facilitation of understanding, the development of taste and discrimination, the stimulation of curiosity and wonder, the fostering of style and a sense of beauty, the growth of a thirst for new ideas and visions of the yet unknown.[26]

SOCIAL CAPITAL

Thus we come to my second concern about educational reform, one I raised at the beginning of this address. Remember when I said that the question, "What's educational about educational reform?" was a serious question? And then remarked that we face the twin tasks of reengaging more robust and profound concepts of both democracy and education? The forms of instruction that currently comprise so much of schooling will hardly suffice as preparation for democratic restoration. Learning

math and science well—even to world-class standards—will not suffice either. Nor will it make that much difference that we have mastered German and Japanese, art and music, history and geography, if we hold these subjects merely as content-acquired and not as understandings and insights needed to be more caring of one another, more reasonable in our relationships with one another, more morally discerning in our conduct as human beings.

We have typically acquired these traits of character and habits of mind through participation in settings that were richly productive of what we now call social capital. Families, churches, neighborhoods, work groups, social organizations, and schools are among the primary producers of social capital. Take one or more of these away, and the result is either less social capital or greater burdens on fewer institutions for the production of social capital. Such is our situation today with respect to so many of the students entering school; their environments simply are not productive of sufficient social capital to sustain them in the development of key traits of character and critical habits of mind, as well as that core of beliefs and understandings necessary to assume responsibility for democratic restoration. Here is a problem whose breadth and depth far exceeds the rhetoric and the reality of the current educational reform movement. Yet it is a problem that directs little of the energy and few of the resources of our respective levels of government and their leaders.

To begin to repair this problem we need a far more profound conception of what it means to participate in the education of our fellow human beings. We must overcome the excessive constraints placed on the cultivation of values and the development of character by a too-restrictive conception of the wall of separation between church and state, as well as by the excessively combative stances of the religious right and the religious left. We need to prepare and encourage our teachers to be as concerned with their moral manner as they are with their subject matter methods. And we must make provision for conflict and controversy in our classrooms so that children learn how to come to grips with differences, when to respect them and leave them as they are, or respect them but seek their reconstruction in the common weal.

EDUCATION AND DEMOCRACY: MIRROR IMAGES

Have I stated my position with sufficient clarity that you see how education and democracy can be understood as mirror

images? That what leads to and sustains the very best forms of liberal democracy is that which enables the most powerful and emancipatory forms of education? That one of the great benefits of a liberal democracy is that it permits—nay, entitles—each and every person to realize the highest potential for human understanding and achievement? That one of the great benefits of an education properly understood is that it makes possible a liberal democracy that enables human flourishing—a flourishing that is not solely dependent on wealth, status, privilege or power, but is available to all on an equal and just basis? This, I believe, is the true promise of democracy.

But it is not the promise of the educational reform agenda currently before us. This agenda permits our democratic ideals to atrophy and our economic desires to enlarge. This enlargement of our economic interests accounts for many of the educational reform proposals we see today. This alone might not be so fearsome were it evident how the realization of the reform agenda would make more and more of us the heroes of Horatio Alger stories, and were it clear how the middle and upper classes would grow, while poverty, crime and disease would diminish. The data show us that these are not the consequences of the current reform movement. And if I am correct in what I have argued, they will not and cannot be the consequences of the present educational reform agenda.

An educational reform agenda that took seriously the notions of democracy and education I have advanced here would focus on an honest and forthright appraisal of what is happening to children and youth in this country. It would also focus on the development of an all-out program to prepare as many as possible to come to grips with and resolve our problems. Certainly mathematics and science, languages and geography, history and the arts are important to these endeavors. They are important not so much as vehicles to economic competitiveness but as means to attain the democratic restoration and to progress toward one of the most remarkable challenges any nation has ever set for itself. Do you recall that challenge? It begins:

> We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness. That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriv-

> ing their just powers from the consent of the governed, That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or abolish it, and to institute a new Government, laying its foundations on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness.

As I read these words from the Declaration of Independence, I realize how puny are my own efforts to capture the context of our past and our future. So allow me to conclude my struggle with these thorny issues by speaking of one or two more things that you and I might do to redirect the agenda for educational reform in America.

THE CHALLENGE

As do all citizens, the press and the professoriate have obligations to understand the fields that are their specialties. In our case, this understanding cannot be gained without immersion in the history, philosophy, politics and economics of education. One's understanding is woefully incomplete if one is uninitiated in the deep and complex meanings of education, from Plato and Aristotle, through Montaigne, Rousseau, and Tolstoy, to Counts, Montessori, Skinner, Sizer, Goodlad, and Noddings, to name but a few. And it is, so far as life in the United States of America is concerned, frighteningly deficient if one lacks a clear comprehension of the relationships between democracy and education. As I read a fair amount of the education press today, I do not sense either of these two critical conditions in the background, or indeed very much in the foreground. And to be fair, it is not a prominent feature of educational scholarship, either.

I encounter little education reporting comparable to science reporting, wherein pains are taken to explain complex ideas independently of some major story. The sidebar, common in technical and scientific contexts, is hardly used in education—as if there is really nothing very complex to be explained here; nothing that needs multiple perspectives, thoughtful subsidiary explanations, or additional, independently expressed points of view. Where there seems to be an appreciation for providing the general public with ample context and explanation to grasp the difficulties of science and mathematics, one sees little of this sensitivity in educational reporting. It is as if education is something

that all of us understand, perhaps because as is often remarked, it is something that has happened to us all. Well, much of the world that science studies happens to us all too, but we do not presume that we understand it merely because we have some experience with it.

The same may be said about democracy, its history and political theory. Unless one has mastered the lessons of liberty, one is in a poor position to write about or teach education. For without comprehending the interconnectedness of education and democracy, one has no sense of what it means to educate, nor of what to look for when asking whether what occurred in some school or classroom setting was truly educative. It is as important to learn one's democratic history, theory and practice as it is to master educational history, theory and practice.

There are a number of items of this kind that could be raised and explored this afternoon. You can probably think of many more than I. I want to turn to one that is especially significant for me, and perhaps more tightly connected to what I have argued for in this address. It is the difference between disagreement and dissent. In reading what gets reported about education today, one forms the impression that reporters never wish to end a story without locating and quoting someone who disagrees with the main line of the story. Occasionally the disagreements are a major part of the story, but most often they come somewhere after the middle, usually at the end, and are just divergent enough in tone or style to make the reader aware that educators seem unable to agree on much of anything. That's disagreement. And it is typically quite disagreeable—to the person championing the main story line, to the critic who is disagreeing, and to the reader, who is most often left with questions about what constitutes a valid point of view on these issues.

Dissent is a very different phenomenon. It is sustained, thoughtful opposition to a story line. It occupies an equal portion of the story, or it has its own story. Its purpose is to inform the debate, to open up the argument, and to allow proponents and opponents to explore their respective positions in ways that force clarification and exposition, offering insight and understanding to the reader. To provide dissent is to take seriously the notion that the reader is a person of power and influence—a conception of the reader that seems to me essential in a democracy. For publishers, editors, and writers to concern themselves solely with disagreement is to presume that

the reader is simply a bystander to the story—an epiphenomenon in the worlds of power, policy and decision making. It is a terrible mistreatment of the reader as one who seeks to be educated by what he or she reads, so that he or she may act more wisely and intelligently in governing education and the nation.

To undertake dissent of the kind I have in mind, the press and the professoriate will have to be on more intimate terms than I currently sense is the case. The forging of such a relationship is one I would look forward to with delight, for many of the awesome responsibilities I have presented here fall on education publishers and writers. As an institution you have an historical link to the maintenance of democracy, and you serve a most important educative function. Both of us, press and professoriate, need to regain our commitment to sustain the ideas and ideals of democracy and of education.

For all that I have said here, I can think of no better way to end than with the sentiments of Lewis Thomas, who in his wonderful little book, *Late Night Thoughts on Listening to Mahler's Ninth Symphony*, said

> I maintain, despite the moment's evidence against the claim, that we are born and grow up with a fondness for each other, and we have genes for that. We can be talked out of it, for the genetic message is like a distant music and some of us are h a r d - o f - h e a r i n g. Societies are noisy affairs, drowning out the sound of ourselves and our connection. Hard-of-hearing, we go to war. Stone-deaf, we make thermonuclear missiles. Nonetheless, the music is there, waiting for more listeners.[27]

It is time for all who would participate in educational reform to listen. The music is there, though it cannot be heard in the reform agenda currently before us. It can be heard, quite clearly and beautifully, in a reform agenda that derives from taking seriously our obligations to democracy, to education, to our progeny.

ENDNOTES

[1]The National Commission on Excellence in Education, *A Nation At Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform* (U.S. Department of Education, 1983).

[2]The notion of a liberal democracy is taken from Colin Wringe, *Democracy, Schooling and Political Education* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1984). Wringe

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

distinguishes liberal from corporate democracies as follows: A liberal democracy obtains in the case of "a state in which the government formally recognizes the right of opposition, criticism, and other means by which it may be made sensitive to what people actually want," in contrast to a state "in which, for whatever reason, the government takes it upon itself to determine what the people's good is, or within what limits it may be found" (p. 8).

[3]Thomas Jefferson to Colonel Charles Yancey, January 6, 1816, in Paul Leicester Ford, ed., *The Writings of Thomas Jefferson* (10 vols.; NY: G. Putnam's Sons, 1892-99), X, 4. Quoted in Lawrence A. Cremin, *The Genius of American Education* (NY: Random House, Vintage, 1965, 1966), p. 5.

[4]Quoted material excerpted from William MacDonald, Ed., *Documentary Source Book of American History*, 1606-1926 (Third Edition; NY: Macmillan, 1928).

[5]Thomas L. Pangle, *The Ennobling of Democracy: The Challenge of the Postmodern Age* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992).

[6]Benjamin Barber, *An Aristocracy of Everyone: The Politics of Education and the Future of America* (NY: Ballantine Books, 1992).

[7]John Goodlad has been a consistently powerful voice for the connection between America's schools and its democratic form of government. See especially John I. Goodlad, *A Place Called School* (NY: McGraw-Hill, 1984); and *Teachers for Our Nation's Schools* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1990). A recent occasional paper from the University of Washington Center for Educational Renewal, which Goodlad directs, is also quite pertinent; see Roger Soder, "Teaching in a Democracy," Occasional Paper No. 19, Center for Educational Renewal, University of Washington, Seattle, Washington.

[8]See Patricia Albjerg Graham, *S.O.S Sustain Our Schools* (NY: Hill and Wang, 1992).

[9]Giroux has stressed the connection between education and democracy in many of his books, although his prose leaves some readers exasperated in their attempts to grasp his meaning. A recent work by Giroux does nothing to ease this sense of exasperation, yet it represents a very powerful statement on the nexus between education and democracy; see Henry Giroux, *Border*

Crossings: Cultural Workers and the Politics of Education (NY: Routledge, 1992).

[10]The best introduction to Critical Pedagogy is Peter McLaren, *Life in Schools: An Introduction to Critical Pedagogy in the Foundations of Education* (Second edition; NY: Longman, 1994). Other key works, in alphabetical order by author, include: Stanley Aronowitz, *The Politics of Identity: Class, Culture, Social Movements* (NY: Routledge, 1992); Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New revised 20th-anniversary edition; NY: Continuum, 1970, 1993); Henry A. Giroux, *Ideology, Culture & The Process of Schooling* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1981); Peter McLaren, *Schooling as a Ritual Performance* (Second edition; NY: Routledge, 1986, 1993); Ira Shor, *Critical Teaching & Everyday Life* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980, 1987); Ira Shor, *Empowering Education: Critical Teaching for Social Change* (NY: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

[11]Jonathan Kozol, *Savage Inequalities: Children in America's Schools* (NY: Crown Publishers, 1991).

[12]Alex Kotlowitz, *There Are No Children Here* (NY: Doubleday Anchor, 1991). See also another work concerning the lives of children in Chicago's project housing: Daniel Coyle, *Hardball* (NY: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1993).

[13]Harold L. Hodgkinson, *All One System: Demographies of Education—Kindergarten through Graduate School* (Washington, DC: Institute for Educational Leadership, 1985), and *A Demographic Look At Tomorrow* (Washington, DC: Institute for Educational Leadership, 1992). See also *Youth Indicators 1993* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, 1993).

[14]Fred Hechinger, *Fateful Choices: Healthy Youth for the 21st Century* (NY: Carnegie Corporation of New York, 1992).

[15]Milton Schwebel, "Educational Pie in the Sky," *The Nation*, May 2, 1994, p. 591-592.

[16]Schwebel, "Educational Pie in the Sky," p. 591.

[17]Schwebel, "Educational Pie in the Sky," p. 592.

[18]Three recent works describe many of the major reform initiatives. They are, *Editors of Education Week, From Risk to Renewal* (Washington, DC:

Editorial Projects in Education, 1993); Chester E. Finn, Jr., and Herbert J. Walberg, Eds., *Radical Education Reforms* (Berkeley, CA: McCutchan Publishing Company, 1994); and John F. Jennings, Ed., *National Issues in Education: The Past Is Prologue* (Bloomington, IN: Phi Delta Kappa and the Institute for Educational Leadership, 1993).

[19]See , for example, Gerald R. Bracey, "The Second Bracey Report on the Condition of Public Education, *Phi Delta Kappan*, October, 1992, 104-117; and Gerald R. Bracey, "The Third Bracey Report of the Condition of Education, *Phi Delta Kappan*, October, 1993, 104-117. See also, Richard M. Jaeger, "World Class Standards, Choice, and Privatization: Weak Measurement Serving Presumptive Policy," *Phi Delta Kappan*, October, 1992, 118-128.

[20]David C. Berliner, "Educational Reform in an Era of Disinformation," a paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, San Antonio, Texas, February, 1992. Significant portions of this paper were published in the NJEA magazine, *NJEA Review*, January 1993, 12-19.

[21]Consider the words of Walter Karp, writing in *Indispensable Enemies: The Politics of Misrule in America* (NY: Franklin Square Press, 1993, p. 242):

> Who benefits from teaching America's children that they are chiefly future employees and jobholders, that America is not a Republic of self-governing citizens but an industrial society of workers, ...? Who benefits from illiteracy and semiliteracy among the mass of the poor and oppressed, from ghetto schools so degraded that Harlem schoolchildren think the police make the laws? Who benefits from teaching future citizens that their liberty is never endangered from usurpers? Who benefits, quite obviously, are the prevailing political usurpers.

[22]A look at the government or political science shelves at public and collegiate libraries, as well as in quality bookstores, offers a dramatic range of titles. I offer here a sample of books that I found instructive. Mentioned first are some of the more general works, followed by those pertaining particularly to education. Samuel H. Beer, *To Make a Nation* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993); Robert N. Bellah, Richard Madsen, William Sullivan, Ann Swidler, & Steven M. Tipton, *The Good Society* (NY: Random House Vintage, 1991); Noam

Chomsky, *Deterring Democracy* (NY: Hill and Wang, 1991, 1992); Robert Coles, *The Call of Service* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1993); E. J. Dionne, Jr., *Why Americans Hate Politics* (NY: Simon & Schuster, 1991); John Dunn, *Western Political Theory in the Face of the Future* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1979, 1993); Amitai Etzioni, *The Spirit of Community: Rights, Responsibilities, and the Communitarian Agenda* (NY: Crown Publishers, 1993); William Greider, *Who Will Tell the People: The Betrayal of American Democracy* (NY: Simon & Schuster, 1992); Frances Moore Lappé & Paul Martin Du Bois, *The Quickening of America: Rebuilding Our Nation, Remaking Our Lives* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1994); Stephen Mulhall and Adam Swift, *Liberals and Communitarians* (Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 1992); Robert D. Putnam, *Making Democracy Work* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993). Works pertaining to education include Ann Bastain, Norm Fruchter, Marilyn Gittell, Colin Greer, & Kenneth Haskins, *Choosing Equality: The Case for Democratic Schooling* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986); Eva T. H. Brann, *Paradoxes of Education in a Republic* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979); Rosemary Chamberlin, *Free Children and Democratic Schools* (NY: Falmer Press, 1989); Lawrence Cremin, *Public Education* (NY: Basic Books, 1976); Amy Guttman, *Democratic Education* (Princeton, NJ: University Press, 1987); Robert B. Westbrook, *John Dewey and American Democracy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991). In addition to these works, the reader may also wish to consult relevant authors cited in earlier notes, particularly Barber (note 6), Pangle (note 5), Soder (note 7), and Wringe (note 2).

[23]John Rawls, *Political Liberalism* (NY: Columbia University Press, 1993).

[24]Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, p. xvi.

[25]Noah Webster to John Canfield, January 6, 1783 (Webster mss., New York Public Library); and Noah Webster, *A Grammatical Institute, of the English Language, Comprising an Easy, Concise, and Systematic Method of Education, Designed for the Use of English Schools in America. In Three Parts. Part 1* (Hartford: Hudson & Goodwin, 1783, pp. 14-15. Quotation taken from Lawrence Cremin, *American Education: The Colonial Experience, 1607-1783* (NY: Harper Torchbooks, 1970), p. 569.

[26]Israel Scheffler, "Basic Mathematical Skills: Some Philosophical and Practical Remarks" *Teachers College Record*, December, 1976, 78(2), p. 206.

[27]Lewis Thomas, *Late Night Thoughts on Listening to Mahler's Ninth Symphony* (NY: The Viking Press, 1980, 1983), p. 105.

The Elam Lecture is named in honor of Stanley Elam, former editor of *Kappan* magazine. Initiated in 1981 as a cornerstone of the annual EdPress conference, the Elam Lecture has assumed the stature of a major address on current education issues. EdPress publishes this lecture and distributes it to EdPress members and selected education writers throughout North America. Past Elam Lecturers include Ernest Boyer, John Brademas, Ralph Tyler, Gordon Ambach, John Goodlad, Linda Darling-Hammond, Lauren Resnick, and David Perkins.